

“The Battle is the Lord’s”
by Rev. Frances Savill
June 23, 2024

1 Samuel 17:1a,4-11,19-23,32-49

This morning as we consider a fairly well-known story of the Bible, I want to begin with giving this story some context. This passage of scripture doesn't exist in isolation, it is part of a much larger narrative, and so I invite you to listen to where this passage fits in the holy Scriptures with a video from The Bible Project. <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/1-samuel/>

In our passage this morning, David is sent by his father to the battle lines to see how it was going – and if his brothers were okay. His father sent David with rations for them – and his father wanted news.

This was the day before cell phones, TV correspondents, or even radio broadcasts. Jesse, David's father, had no idea what was happening with the battle, if his sons were still alive or dead. And so he sent David.

David arrived in time to hear the daily insults launched by the Philistine warrior Goliath. And we know what happened. The little guy defeats the big bully – and we all cheer.

Hollywood has made thousands of movies using this formula. It sells well. We all imagine we are David, standing up to Goliath and defeating him.

But let's leave Hollywood for a while, and consider the Biblical text afresh, listening to God's word for us. There are a few key things in this passage to consider and keep in mind.

First, consider why David decided to fight Goliath. Goliath and the Philistines insulted and blasphemed God. David couldn't bear to have them insult the honour and character of God.

David was not defending himself. He wasn't motivated by self-pride or arrogance, and he wasn't defending his own honour. This battle wasn't about David or David's reputation; but rather it was about God, God's reputation, and trusting in what God had said that God will do.

And then note, David doesn't assume that he can defeat Goliath. Rather, he holds to what God can do.

He also looks to someone else to do the job. It's not David's place to be the champion of Israel. David doesn't think "he's the only guy for the job." David believes that God will work through the one who will stand and so he challenges his brothers and the other soldiers to do the right thing.

There isn't an arrogance to David – he isn't the only man, but on the other side, David doesn't leave the battle for the professionals – or for someone else to pick up the ball. While he isn't the only the man for the job, he still hangs in, is still willing to be sent as God's man for the job.

When no one else will do the right thing, when no one else will stand, David will stand alone.

David goes to Saul, the King. Again, David doesn't just take this on himself, he doesn't go barrelling in, guns blazing, it's not all about David. He goes to Saul, submits himself to the king, seeks permission to do what needs to be done.

Today we need people to step up and do the right thing, even, or especially when no one else will. We need people who know the character of God, who will act for God, who will do the right things, and step up, even when the job really belongs to someone else.

"Well, that's not my job" shouldn't be a refrain in the church, or amongst God's people. Rather, we are called to be servant leaders, challenging each other to do the right thing, and then stepping into the gap ourselves.

David was not totally unprepared for the job of standing before Goliath. He had defeated other enemies, lions and bears. He will use what he knows, but his refrain is constant, "the battle belongs to the Lord."

What he knows won't be enough, his skills, his strength aren't sufficient – but God is enough. David's faith and trust in God is amazing.

David's story reminds me of the stories of Gladys Aylward. Gladys was a missionary to China in the 1930's. After teaching the stories in the Bible to villagers in China, the people expected Gladys to have the power of God at work in her that was at work in David or Daniel.

One day the Mandarin sent for her. There was a riot going on inside the local prison. "Thank goodness you have come!" said the governor of the prison, wringing his hands. "You must go in and stop the riot!" Gladys was shocked. "Me?" Why don't you send your soldiers?"

"Impossible!" the man cried. "These prisoners are murderers and thieves! The soldiers would certainly be killed!" "But" Gladys protested, "if I were to go in there, they would kill me."

"Oh no," said the governor. "You tell our people that God lives inside you. If what you say is true, surely your God will protect you when you go inside the prison."

Gladys stared at the two men. Were they making fun of her? But they were serious. She swallowed hard. "All right," she said slowly. "Open the gate." Gladys was so frightened her knees were shaking.

Inside the prison courtyard, a horrible sight greeted her. Prisoners were chasing one another with knives and screaming like madmen. Dead and wounded prisoners were lying everywhere. And running straight toward her was a huge man holding an axe over his head! Gladys was so terrified she couldn't move.

But when the man was only a few feet away, he suddenly stopped. One by one, the other prisoners stopped yelling and running and just looked at her. Who was this short little woman? What was she doing there?

Gladys' God was with her. Order was restored to the prison, life for the prisoners changed, Gladys began a prison ministry.

God chooses how and when God works. God very often works in less dramatic ways than God worked with David or Gladys.

God is not ours to command or control, in fact it is very much the opposite. God uses us, when we are malleable in God's hands, following God's way, seeking God's honour, and mostly God uses us in simple ways, so that we don't forget that it is God's power that is at work, not our own.

God uses some of the most unlikely people, in the most unlikely situations, helping us learn the way of Jesus, the servant King.

Jesus is the only one who followed God's commands from beginning to end without fail. Jesus' life was entirely about doing His Father's will and giving glory to his Father.

The rest of us succeed and fail.

But I have seen that God uses you, God uses Calvin Church as an instrument of God's love and grace in the world.

We haven't defeated any giants to my knowledge, but we learning to be used by God, for God's work, for God's glory, and who knows where that will lead us.

Thanks be to God.